



FABJOB GUIDE TO  
**BECOME A  
PARTY PLANNER**



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## 1. Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to become a professional party planner. Everyone knows there's nothing better than being at a lively party where people are laughing and having a great time. As a party planner, you'll not only be immersed in a festive atmosphere, you'll also get the credit for every event that's a smash success.

Chances are that if you are considering pursuing party planning as a career, there's a reason for it. Do you have a love of bringing people together? Do you throw a great party? Party planners often say that they got the idea to make a career of party planning from the encouragement of others, who told them they had a talent for it.

Maybe you are the "go-to" person for office events like retirement parties or baby showers. People know that you have creative ideas, and are organized enough to handle all the details of planning a party (in addition to keeping up with your day job).

The personal satisfaction of being a party planner is enough to entice many people to pursue this career, but party planning can also be financially rewarding. Some party planners reach income levels of more than six figures, and have several employees on staff.

Just think of Debi Lilly of A Perfect Event, who put together Oprah's 50th birthday bash, or Mary Micucci of Along Came Mary Productions, who organizes star-studded Hollywood award show events every year. Lifestyle and event expert David Tutera transformed his skills for party planning into a popular book and TV show.

Whatever drew you to this career, it's time to take the leap from party expert to party professional, and get paid to use your talents. With the information in this book, your flair for knowing just the right look and music for every occasion, and your natural ability to organize anything down to the finest details, you're well on your way to becoming the toast of the town as a successful party planner.

## **1.1 Party Planning as a Profession**

Party planning is an exciting way to make a living, and the future looks bright. Much of the baby boomer generation has acquired wealth in their pre-retirement years, but a lack of personal time has been the price. Hiring someone to plan a party for an occasion is considered a reasonable and necessary expense for these busy people.

We have witnessed the relatively recent explosion of magazines, TV shows and channels, and other popular media devoted to dining, decorating and entertaining in style. It has become expected that we can do it all with the flair of a Martha Stewart, but not everyone has that creative talent. That's where you as the party planner come in — to make the rest of us look good!

Also, the corporate party is currently seen as a great way to reward employees, and it's also a decent tax write-off for businesses. Those working as party planners are riding a wave of profitability brought on by this consumer willingness to spend on parties and party professionals. And it doesn't look as though the party atmosphere is going away anytime soon. Intrigued? Let's take a closer look at what the job entails.

### **1.1.1 What a Party Planner Does**

Party planners organize and help execute social events. They meet with clients who are planning to host an event, and help them decide on a theme and set a budget. They purchase or make supplies on behalf of

the client, meet and contract with venues and vendors, and arrange all the details that will be key to the event's success.

Some party planners make invitations and decorations themselves, or may purchase them at a discount from vendors. They set everything up in advance, and then are usually on hand to supervise the event and other service providers such as caterers from start to finish. They often coordinate the clean-up as well.

Party planners sell peace of mind to their clients. Instead of bustling around worrying about whether the punch is running low and when the band is going to show up, when they have hired a party planner the host can simply socialize and enjoy their party.

Vendors who are involved in professionally planned parties typically make their agreements with the planner, not directly with the client or venue. The planner is the one who has the authority and responsibility of carrying out the client's wishes.

Party planners are usually self-employed, and most work from a home office. Party planners are responsible for all the usual tasks associated with running a small business, such as paying bills, banking, and filing paperwork.

Most party planners also spend a good amount of their time seeking out new clients, especially when they are first starting their business. They may volunteer their time and expertise to get increased exposure, or dream up creative ads to place in magazines and local papers. And of course, networking with potential venues and vendors is a big part of the job.

## **Types of Planning Services**

Although some people might refer to party planners as event planners, party planners have a specialty that sets them apart. Whereas an event planner may organize meetings and corporate seminars, party planners primarily only work on gatherings and events in which the primary focus is to socialize, celebrate and have fun.

So essentially, party planners are event planners who specialize in social events. Other event planners with different specialties may call

themselves meeting planners, destination management consultants, or wedding planners.

While the consequence of planning what is called an event and what is called a party is often much the same, most planners hold a distinction between the two.

“Event,” explains Orin Kennedy of Puccio Designs, “means large — several hundred guests, like at a wedding, or something more corporate or charitable in nature, whereas a party could be anything from a dinner for 12 to a birthday or cocktail reception for 100 or more.”

As you’ll see, different party planners provide different levels of service, or may specialize in certain aspects of the party, such as entertainment. A party planner who provides full service will handle every detail of the party and attend it as well. They are responsible for hiring all of the vendors that may be needed like DJs and caterers, and will also coordinate their efforts. The party planner who provides partial services may be able to refer clients to their preferred vendors, but is usually not responsible for any aspect of the party beyond their agreed-upon contributions, such as decorating or planning a theme.

Party planner Bernard Puccio distinguishes between partial and complete planning with reference to whatever control the host of a party wants to retain. “Partial planning,” he says, “might [only] involve those elements that the host will not be handling personally. We usually do it all, from the invitations to the cleanup. We are a complete [service] company.”

## **Who Becomes a Party Planner?**

Party planning is an attractive career for people who are creative, crafty, and who love meeting people and socializing. They usually like to entertain in their own homes, and are known for being warm and wonderful hosts. They are strong-willed, and good at getting what they want from (while maintaining good relationships with) people they work with.

Great party planners have a knack for coming up with unique ideas. They can see the potential for party décor and supplies in everyday items, and the potential for a great venue in an unremarkable place.

They know that a great party does not need to cost their clients a fortune.

A number of planners have started out in the party service business as caterers, DJs, or florists. They gradually expanded the scope of services that they offered so that they became planners who also provide catering or other services for the parties they plan.

In the case of Bernardo Puccio and his partner Orin Kennedy, their Los Angeles-based interior-design business evolved naturally into party and event planning. “The two [services] are so alike in the work process,” Kennedy says. “Most of our party planning clients originate from our interior design clientele or are recommended by someone who’s been a guest at one of our events.”

With a Hollywood and Beverly Hills clientele, the Puccio design firm’s mission evolved and enlarged to encompass entertainment and fundraising needs of a rich, famous, and satisfied client base. The expansion was organic because of the service orientation of entertainment planning and interior design.

## 1.1.2 Types of Parties

As a party planner, your clients will come to you with a broad range of party needs. Here are some of the types of events that party planners organize. As you read the list, think about what most interests you — that could become your specialty when you start up your business.

### Private Parties

People throw events of all kinds for themselves, friends, and family, to mark milestones or celebrate holidays. You may have hosted or attended many of the following:

- Anniversaries
- Bar/bat mitzvahs
- Birthdays
- Bon voyage parties
- Children’s parties

- Class reunions
- Dinner parties
- Engagement parties
- First communion/Confirmation parties
- Graduation parties
- Holiday parties
- Open-house parties
- Wedding showers

All of these and more may require the services of a party planner. The more guests the host wants to invite, the more likely it is that planning services will be requested.

Some individuals who use party planners are accustomed to entertaining and are prepared to use planners either to execute their ideas precisely or to support them with “idea help” in limited ways. “We deal with people who throw parties all the time,” says Micah LaNasa, marketing director for Emerald Bay Events, a Seattle-area full-service planning firm. “They know what they want, but may need help going to the next level.”

Like many other party planners, Emerald also deals with what LaNasa describes as “people who have never thrown a party in their lives.” You may have to handhold insecure clients through the process as it goes along, either tempering or accommodating new requests, as needed.

## Corporate Parties

When you think about planning parties your first thought may be of private events. However, there is a need for party planners in the corporate world as well. Corporate events may require you to do more work, but they also generally pay more. Businesses may use planners to coordinate social events such as:

- Annual holiday parties
- Company picnics or family days
- Corporate anniversaries

- Product launches
- Open houses
- Celebrating business success
- Employee social events
- Awards banquets
- Luncheons

Planning corporate events often requires more lead-up time, and the decision-making process may be more complex. Frequently you will report to more than one person, and possibly a committee of involved individuals. Ideally, you want to identify one main decision-maker to work with — many businesses have on staff a person or persons who may be familiar with party-planning territory.

Some corporations have rather elaborate approval processes for every stage of every project. According to planner Micah LaNasa, there is no guarantee of getting one central point of contact with corporate clients. “We’ve had an army of five or six people come in, so that we made a presentation to a committee,” he explains.

## **Fundraising Parties**

Planning parties for nonprofit organizations entails many of the same issues as is the case for the corporate market, plus a few unique ones. Some nonprofits require the input of board members in making decisions. Orin Kennedy of Puccio Designs in Los Angeles cites “the complexities of reporting to committees” when dealing with parties and events for nonprofits.

Add to this the issue of financial constraints. Nonprofits that throw big parties frequently do so for the purpose of raising funds, not spending them. You’ll need to be creative in seeking services on a budget, and may even be asked to donate your time as well. While this might seem like a strange idea, there are extensive networking opportunities that make working with nonprofits (at least some of the time) attractive to party planners.

Your contacts with those who may be involved in a community-service organization, as well as the wealthy people who donate might wish to

turn to you in the future for their entertainment-planning needs. You can also use nonprofit events to build your portfolio and awareness of your services.

### **1.1.3 Benefits of this Career**

Party planning is an exciting, fun and creative career that offers the flexibility of working from home, but without the isolation that sometimes comes with home-based businesses. This is because you're always meeting new people, visiting new places and, yes, going to parties.

We've already touched on what a growing and potentially lucrative market the party planning industry is right now. But the benefits of this career don't end here. Here's a short but impressive list of some of the benefits enjoyed by party planners.

#### **Enjoyable Work**

In what profession other than party planning can you visit the ballroom of a castle in the morning, taste the salmon and champagne to be served at an upcoming event in the afternoon, and attend an elegant soirée that evening? Few others can claim that they have this much fun in a lifetime, let alone a day.

And the reason is clear: it's a profession built around creating fun, so you're bound to get in the way of the revelry from time to time. Just think of picking out decorations for a 50th anniversary party, or watching a child's face light up when a life-sized Dora the Explorer walks through the door. It can become difficult to differentiate between work and play in this career.

#### **Being Creative**

Many creative people are drawn to party planning, and it doesn't disappoint. Decorating venues, making your own centerpieces, setting elegant tables, and crafting stylish invitations are just a few of the creative outlets for party planners. The entire industry is one in which you are constantly being creatively challenged, and consistently working with other creative people.

More than this, the options for the types of party services that you provide are wide open. You can focus on throwing children's or adult parties, wedding-related parties or corporate affairs, or make the focus of your parties centered around wonderfully catered meals. The choice is yours.

## **Working from Home**

Many people dream of working from home, setting their own hours, and being their own boss. The low start-up cost and lack of need for equipment and space make party planning perfect as a home-based business. In fact, few in the industry operate anywhere other than from home. Other than set times for parties, this career offers the flexibility of setting your own hours and schedule.

## **Unlimited Income Potential**

The trend of hiring party planners to throw all types of parties has created an industry in which income potential is only limited by the drive and imagination of the individual.

Corporate parties can earn party planners thousands of dollars for a single event. Even a small start-up party business throwing birthday, graduation and anniversary parties will earn the planner at least \$25 to \$30 an hour, and many charge much more. And the opportunity to be earning six figures as the planner for high-end or celebrity events exists for those who make it to the top.

## **You Can Start Right Now**

Party planners do not require a degree in "festivity studies" (okay, we made that up!) or any special certification or licensing to get started. From the first day you arrange to plan a get-together for a friend or relative, you can start calling yourself a party planner.

Additionally, this is the kind of business you can start with a few hundred dollars in your pocket. You don't need many supplies since you are selling "yourself" and your great party ideas.

## 1.2 Inside This Guide

This book is a guide to getting started in the thrilling world of party planning. It provides industry information on everything from the skills you'll need, to finding the right venues for your parties. Here's a first glance at what you'll find in the chapters ahead.

Chapter 2 takes a step-by-step look at the logistics of planning a party for a client. It covers the initial meeting, selecting a location, designing the creative elements such as theme and décor, getting yourself and your events organized, and what your role is once the first guests arrive.

Chapter 3 helps you prepare for your career as a party planner by identifying the skills that you need to succeed, and providing you with the tools and resources for enhancing these skills. It also tells how to gain valuable experience through training and volunteer experience.

Chapter 4 offers concrete advice on starting your own party planning business. It also looks at preparing a business plan and a start-up budget, as well as some of the legal matters associated with doing business, and those unique to party planning.

Chapter 5 looks at the secrets of running a successful party planning business, starting with setting up your office, the equipment you'll need, and how to hire staff or contractors. The importance of your relationship with vendors, and how to enhance this relationship, is covered in detail. Finally, the all-important issue of what and how to charge your clients is explained in this section.

Chapter 6 provides tips on finding those clients out there who want to throw a party. Marketing strategies such as brochures, websites and advertising are compared and contrasted. Alternative ways for your party planning business to get the attention that it needs are also explored.

Throughout the book are insights and tips from more than 20 successful party planners and party industry experts, as well as checklists and forms you can adapt and use for your own business. So if you're ready, let's get this party started!